

Post Forum Catalogue

2024



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



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GLOBAL QUALITY
AND STANDARDS PROGRAMME

THE 2nd NATIONAL FORUM FOR QUALITY AND STANDARDS

Empowering Change

Quality and Standards for
People, Planet and Prosperity





● **Family Photo**

November 19th, 2024, Tirana, Albania

2nd NATIONAL FORUM FOR QUALITY & STANDARDS 2024

BACKGROUND

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

2nd National Forum for Quality & Standards 2024

Post Forum Catalogue

Held on the 19th of November 2024 in Tirana, Albania

The Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation (MEKI), in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), organized the National Forum for Quality and Standards 2024 as part of the Global Quality and Standards Programme (GQSP). This forum was supported by the Swiss Government through the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

November is celebrated as International Quality Month, and the forum highlighted the theme “Quality and Standards for People, Planet, and Prosperity,” emphasizing Albania’s path to EU integration, sustainability, and export competitiveness. The event provided a platform to discuss the importance of building a robust Quality Infrastructure (QI) and promoting a culture of quality across institutions, producers, and consumers.

More than 200 participants attended the forum, including representatives from the government, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), businesses, international organizations, policymakers, experts, Quality Infrastructure institutions (such as the General Directorates of Accreditation, Standardization, and Metrology), academia, food safety authorities, key associations, and private sector stakeholders. Discussions focused on Albania’s alignment with international standards and the practical steps required to strengthen QI, promote sustainability, and support SME growth.

Quality and standards are crucial for Albania’s industry and its competitiveness, particularly in the context of EU alignment and integration.

❖ **Market access:** A robust Quality Infrastructure enables Albanian firms to assess and verify their products’ conformity with international market requirements, which is essential for gaining and maintaining access to the European Single Market.

❖ **Harmonization with EU regulations:** Quality Infrastructure development helps Albania align its standards, certification, and regulatory frameworks with those of the European Union, a critical step in the country’s EU integration process.

❖ **Enhancing SME competitiveness:** Improved Quality Infrastructures supports small and medium-sized enterprises in meeting international standards, crucial for accessing international markets and competing globally. Collective efficiencies, through Local Action Groups, advance SME competitiveness and quality of production.

❖ **Sector-specific improvements:** Quality Infrastructure development strengthens key sectors like agriculture, particularly in areas such as food safety and environmental protection. A strong understanding and culture for quality are essential for achieving sustainable transformation and long-term impact.

❖ **Advancing EU accession negotiations:** By focusing on Quality Infrastructure, Albania demonstrates progress in critical areas of the EU acquis, such as the free movement of goods, which is essential for advancing in accession negotiations and eventual EU membership.



Opening Remarks



Ms. Dorina Nati
United Nations Industrial
Development Organization,
UNIDO HQ



H.E. Ruth Huber
Head of Mission of
Switzerland to Albania



H.E. Fiona McCluney
Permanent Representative of
the United Nations to Albania

Panel 1: Quality Infrastructure - A Driver for Sustainable Development



Ms. Pranvera Fagu
General Director of
Accreditation



Ms. Kostanca Dedja
General Directorate of
Standardization (DPS)



Ms. Jonida Boci
Director General, Institute of
Food Safety and Veterinary
(ISUV)



Ms. Klodiana Balla
CEO, BioInspecta Ltd



Mr. Filip Gjoka
Albanian Medicinal and
Aromatic Plants Association



Mr. Nigel Croft
Senior Expert on Quality
Infrastructure, UNIDO

Panel 2: Boosting Trade and Export - Meeting Private Sector Needs



Mr. Edvin Zhllima
Professor, Agricultural
University of Tirana (UBT)



Mr. Sokol Duma
Deputy Minister, Ministry of
Economy, Culture and Innovation
(MEKI)



Ms. Dorina Nati
United Nations Industrial
Development Organization,
HQ



Ms. Ermira Gjerci
Chief of Staff, Ministry
of Agriculture and Rural
Development (MoARD)



Mr. Agim Rrapaj
CEO, Albanian Agribusiness
Council (KASH)



Ms. Ana Shurdha
"Drini-Buna" Local Action Group,
Shkoder region

Empowering
Change



Opening Remarks

Quality and standards are not merely technical considerations – they are fundamental pillars supporting Albania’s sustainable growth and integration into the global economy. As the country strives to realize its potential and achieve its ambitious goal of 1 billion USD in exports by 2030, the importance of quality and standards cannot be overstated.

However, to fully capitalize on these advantages and access international markets, we must address the challenges related to quality, traceability, and compliance with international standards. By leveraging quality and strengthening quality infrastructure – including standardization, metrology, accreditation, and conformity assessment services – Albania can enhance the competitiveness of its enterprises and ensure the safety and quality of its products. This is crucial for gaining the trust of international markets and reducing border rejections, which have been obstacles to export growth. Moreover, a strong commitment to quality and standards aligns closely with the aspirations for EU membership.

UNIDO has a proven track record spanning over 50 years in developing quality infrastructure systems that act as engines of development, helping improve industrial and economic performance. The UNIDO approach is both systemic and holistic. It encompasses all aspects from building awareness to develop fit-for-purpose quality infrastructure and strengthen private sector capacities. We must see quality infrastructure not as a technical constraint, but as an innovative platform for sustainable solutions.

The forum on Quality Infrastructure (QI) marks a significant step in supporting Albania’s economic alignment with European standards, opening new opportunities for Albanian products and services in the European market. Developing a robust QI system is essential not only for meeting EU requirements but also for fostering trust and transparency among consumers, businesses, and investors. This approach ensures competitiveness and sustained trade growth.

Key actions to achieve these goals include strengthening national standards, building the capacity of accreditation bodies, enhancing conformity assessment mechanisms, and ensuring product traceability. For agricultural producers, the challenge lies in maintaining quality while increasing production. For the government, it involves fostering coordination among institutions and collaboration with the private sector. These efforts aim to create a more competitive and sustainable Albania.



Ms. Dorina Nati

United Nations Industrial
Development Organization,
HQ



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the United Nations to Albania

Quality and standards go beyond regulatory requirements; they are key enablers of economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity. By adhering to quality standards, Albania can promote sustainable industrial practices, advance circular economy initiatives, and uphold fair labor conditions. The UNIDO-SECO initiative is committed to helping Albania comply with international norms while also promoting inclusivity and sustainability.

A key focus of the GQSP programme is gender equality and women’s empowerment. Women-led businesses are essential contributors to economic growth, and ensuring their active participation in quality management is crucial for bridging the gender gap and driving broader development.

The modernization of quality infrastructure is critical in the era of digital transformation. Integrating new technologies and digital solutions will help SMEs remain competitive and innovative in both local and global markets. Furthermore, protecting the environment is a necessity, and standards play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable resource use and ecosystem protection.

By enhancing its quality infrastructure, Albania can achieve growth that benefits both its economy and future generations.





Panel 1

Panel 1: Quality Infrastructure A Driver for Sustainable Development



Ms. Pranvera Fagu
General Director of
Accreditation

Q: How does DPA's accreditation help Albanian CABs and SMEs meet market requirements, environmental and quality standards for international market access?

Accreditation ensures that Albanian Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) operate to internationally recognized standards, enabling SMEs to access EU and global markets with confidence. DPA's membership in international accreditation organizations, such as EA and IAF guarantees the equivalence of Albanian accredited services with those of member countries, fostering trust and global recognition. Accredited services undergo continuous evaluation and monitoring to maintain compliance and integrity, ensuring reliability for international markets. Additionally, DPA is subject to regular audits by international bodies, demonstrating its adherence to global standards and further strengthening its credibility. By expanding certification schemes such as GlobalG.A.P. and promoting awareness among stakeholders, DPA plays a pivotal role in building trust and enhancing Albania's Quality Infrastructure in alignment with international norms.

"Accreditation builds trust and serves as a gateway for Albanian businesses to compete successfully in international markets."



Ms. Kostas Dedja
General Directorate of
Standardization (DPS)

Q: Could you share how DPS is advancing the digitalization of Albanian standards, and what immediate benefits these improvements bring to businesses in meeting EU sustainability requirements?

Digitalization is a key step toward aligning Albania's national standardization practices with modern international systems and securing full membership in European standardization bodies. The initial phase of digitizing the Standards Management System has been successfully completed, integrating all functions and processes into a centralized database. This ensures transparency at every stage, from adoption to publication, and allows stakeholders to actively participate in standard development.

Through digitalization, Albanian businesses can access the latest information on European and international standards, enhancing their ability to meet sustainability and market requirements. This progress is essential for aligning Albania's Quality Infrastructure with EU regulations and fostering integration into global frameworks.

"Digitalization goes beyond technology—it enhances transparency, accessibility, and alignment with European standards."



Ms. Jonida Boci
Director General, Institute of
Food Safety and Veterinary
(ISUV)

Q: How is ISUV contributing to improve food safety testing and reporting, and how does this help Albania meet EU requirements?

ISUV plays a critical role in ensuring food safety and supporting Albania's compliance with EU standards. As a reference laboratory under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, ISUV has maintained ISO 17025 accreditation since 2008, safeguarding the quality of exported products. This year, ISUV will finalize the accreditation for Group 6 under SANTE guidelines, which includes medicinal and aromatic plants, completing the process for 250 pesticide analyses.

EU pesticide regulations have been tailored to Albania's agricultural landscape, prioritizing pesticide residues relevant to the country's soil composition and farming practices. While ISUV addresses official controls, collaboration with private and educational laboratories is vital to expand capacity. Sustainable growth in exports requires continuous accreditation, reliable testing, and strengthened cooperation across the sector to meet EU standards.

"Sustainability and quality are key to the success of Albania's exports - collaboration and accredited testing are the foundation for progress."



Ms. Klodiana Balla
CEO, BioInspecta Ltd

Q: How does BioInspecta help Albanian products meet international organic standards, boost export opportunities, and support businesses in overcoming certification challenges?

BioInspecta plays a pivotal role in supporting Albania's organic agriculture by providing comprehensive certification services aligned with international standards, including European, U.S., and Swiss regulations. Operating for nearly 20 years, the organization has streamlined inspection processes, adapting to evolving buyer requirements and offering multiple certifications through a single inspection. Beyond certification, BioInspecta conducts training sessions to help farmers understand and comply with complex regulatory changes. Addressing the absence of accredited domestic laboratories, BioInspecta highlights the urgent need for credible local facilities to reduce costs and improve competitiveness for organic producers. Albania's organic sector holds significant potential to compete on quality, but achieving this requires cohesive efforts from farm-level production to market monitoring. Initiatives like UNIDO's support for a national product certification scheme are instrumental in reducing certification costs and fostering sustainable growth.

"Quality starts at the source and requires a holistic approach - from empowering farmers to ensuring market oversight - to drive sustainable growth and competitiveness."



Mr. Filip Gjoka

Albanian Medicinal and
Aromatic Plants Association

Q: Can you address the main challenges Albanian SMEs in the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs) sector face in meeting international quality and sustainability standards, and how these can be overcome?

Albania's medicinal and aromatic plants (MAP) sector has achieved significant export growth, driven by high demand in international markets such as the U.S. and Europe. However, challenges persist in complying with international quality and sustainability standards. The absence of an accredited domestic laboratory for pesticide analysis forces exporters to rely on international facilities, increasing costs and reducing efficiency. Establishing such a laboratory is critical to meeting the rigorous requirements of global buyers, including analyses for over 1,500 different pesticides.

The sector also faces competition from 25 other countries with stronger government subsidies and more advanced infrastructure. Retaining funds spent abroad on testing and leveraging Albania's talented workforce could strengthen the industry and boost local economic growth. Collaboration and concrete actions, such as creating accredited facilities and improving quality infrastructure, are essential to enhancing the sector's competitiveness and export potential.

"To raise quality and competitiveness in global markets, Albania urgently needs an accredited laboratory for pesticide analysis—a key step for safe exports and expanded opportunities."



Mr. Nigel Croft

Senior Expert on Quality
Infrastructure, UNIDO

Q: Nigel you have heard about QI in Albania now. What do you see as the three top priorities to advance QI specifically in support of Albania's EU alignment and sustainable growth goals?

We face six major challenges due to climate change: floods, water inundation, and dam failures; forest and pasture fires; technological accidents; earthquakes; infectious diseases; erosion and landslides; and extreme weather events such as heavy hail, rain, snow, storms, and avalanches.

Our costs have increased significantly, partly due to unnecessary pesticide spraying caused by a lack of knowledge. Additionally, some pesticides and insecticides imported into Albania are ineffective, outdated, or non-compliant with regulations. This issue requires urgent attention and oversight

"Quality is about meeting the needs and expectations of markets and future generations. It's a journey requiring knowledge, leadership, and collective commitment."



Recommendations

Role in the Quality Infrastructure

- Encourage women's involvement in policy
- Promote gender equality in quality control and governance

Role in the Value Chain

- Promote equal access to land, capital, and financial support
- Expand advisory services with gender-sensitive approaches on good collection and agricultural practices and post-harvest
- Provide tools, machinery, and training to support women's work
- Improve women's market access, strategic product development and participation



Panel 2

Panel 2: Boosting Trade and Export Meeting Private Sector Needs



Mr. Edvin Zhllima

Professor, Agricultural
University of Tirana (UBT)

Q: What specific impacts of climate change are currently affecting the agrifood sector in Albania, and how can improving quality standards help farmers and producers adapt to these challenges?

Climate change is significantly impacting Albania's agrifood sector, with rising temperatures and unpredictable conditions disrupting farming practices. Adapting to these challenges begins with agricultural support schemes that include grants to educate farmers on investing in climate adaptation tools and technologies. Improved knowledge sharing is crucial, enabling farmers to adjust production protocols and capitalize on opportunities brought by climate change, such as cultivating resilient wild medicinal and aromatic plants, which are now found at higher altitudes.

Rising temperatures have compelled some exporters to relocate investments and have disrupted traditional farming methods, particularly in the watermelon sector, where extreme heat has shifted production timelines. Farmers need localized weather warning systems to provide accurate and timely information, as reliance on practical knowledge alone is no longer sufficient. Investments in such technological tools and adaptation-focused initiatives are essential to mitigating the effects of climate change and ensuring sustainable agricultural practices.

“Climate adaptation is not just about responding to change; it's about equipping farmers with the knowledge and tools to turn challenges into opportunities.”

Q: How is MEKI enhancing the private sector's competitiveness to boost exports?

MEKI has been instrumental in enhancing Albania's private sector competitiveness, doubling exports from €2.5 billion to €5 billion over five years, with an ambitious goal of reaching €8 billion annually. Key initiatives include participation in the Regional Common Market and CEFTA, fostering economic integration, and expanding trade exchanges. In 2023, exports to CEFTA countries grew by 8%, accounting for 18.1% of total exports.

Modernizing customs procedures through innovation and digitalization has reduced the time and costs associated with trade operations. Initiatives such as expanding green corridors, which benefit 61 products, have further facilitated agricultural trade. MEKI also supports SMEs through grants, enhancing their capacities and introducing advanced technologies to align products with European standards. Proactive private sector engagement is essential to fully realize Albania's export potential in competitive European markets.

“Innovation and collaboration are at the core of boosting Albania's exports and ensuring alignment with European market demands.”



Ms. Dorina Nati

United Nations Industrial
Development Organization,
HQ

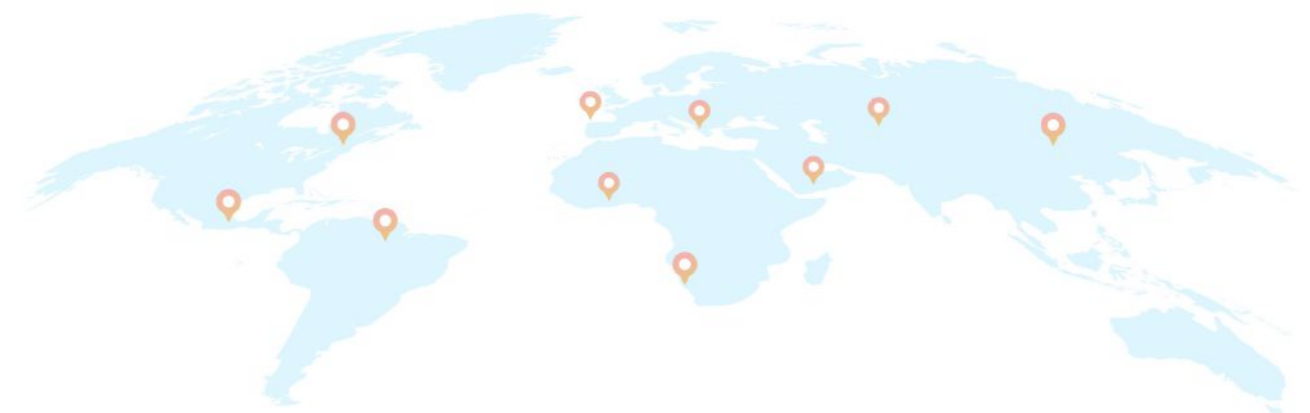
Q: From a UNIDO perspective, what are the main quality-related barriers Albanian producers face in entering foreign markets? What needs to be in place nationally to boost export potential?

Quality is a system that requires collaboration among all actors to boost Albania's export potential. Key barriers faced by Albanian producers include exceeding pesticide limits, the use of banned pesticides, bacterial contamination, and a lack of traceability. These issues often stem from limited producer knowledge and inadequate testing capacity. Complying with evolving EU and international standards is complex and costly, particularly for SMEs, but it adds significant value to domestic products.

Following a comprehensive approach, UNIDO has conducted complementary studies on quality-related challenges, such as the impact of climate change on quality and competitiveness and the role of women in quality. A major focus of UNIDO's interventions is empowering SMEs through technical assistance, training sessions, and guidance on certification schemes like GlobalGAP. Promoting organic production is a strategic priority, enabling Albania to enter higher value markets with its quality products. Collaboration with Local Action Groups in regions like Shkodra, Korça, and Tirana strengthens collective efficiency and resource sharing.

At the same time, improving testing and certification services within Albania is essential to reduce costs for producers. Domestic services must be accredited and internationally recognized to ensure the value of Albanian products in global markets. Accessible standards and effective conformity assessments are critical components of a strong Quality Infrastructure. UNIDO also emphasizes building awareness and educating the next generation of quality-focused professionals through partnerships with institutions like the Agricultural University of Tirana.

“Quality and standards are not just technical requirements; they are gears of Albania's economic growth, and all actors must collaborate to ensure that this powerful engine runs smoothly.”





Ms. Ermira Gjeci

Chief of Staff, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD)

Q: How does MoARD support exporters, and what's needed to improve agricultural competitiveness in line with EU standards?

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) is driving agricultural growth by aligning with EU standards and providing financial support to farmers and producers. Its efforts prioritize regulatory alignment in key areas such as food safety, rural development, and fisheries, ensuring compliance with international trade requirements. Financial support is strategically targeted, prioritizing value-added investments such as protective nets for fruit orchards and vineyards, with significant funding allocated to infrastructure projects like flood dams and irrigation systems. MoARD has also allocated €20 million to upgrade laboratories at border inspection points to enhance food safety and product certification. The ministry emphasizes cooperative engagement under the new Inspection Law, raising awareness among farmers about compliance rather than relying on punitive measures. Additionally, agrotourism has been identified as a key sector to revitalize rural economies, while measures to improve food safety and agricultural resilience are paving the way for Albania to boost its export potential and meet EU market standards.

“Reaching \$1 billion in agricultural exports requires strategic alignment with EU standards and empowering our farmers with the tools to succeed in competitive markets.”



Ms. Ana Shurdha

“Drini-Buna” Local Action Group, Shkoder region

Q: How does the Local Action Group promote cooperation to ensure quality and sustainability in rural agriculture?

The Local Action Group (LAG) fosters cooperation to enhance quality and sustainability in rural agriculture by supporting farmers through knowledge exchange, infrastructure development, and access to resources. Training sessions and seminars help farmers adopt sustainable practices that increase productivity and improve product quality. LAG also facilitates the development of essential rural infrastructure, such as irrigation systems and roads, to support efficient and cost-effective production.

Collaboration among farmers is encouraged through the formation of cooperatives and farmer groups, which improve access to markets, equipment, and technical knowledge. LAG promotes organic farming and environmentally friendly methods, ensuring sustainable agricultural practices that align with market demands. Additionally, the group assists farmers in securing loans or grants to enhance production capabilities. By providing these resources and facilitating collective action, LAG helps build a resilient and high-quality rural agricultural system.

“Through cooperation and tailored solutions, rural communities can overcome challenges and achieve high-quality, sustainable agriculture.”



Mr. Agim Rrapaj

CEO, Albanian Agribusiness Council (KASH)

Q: How does KASH support cooperation to strengthen the voice of local actors?

The Albanian Agribusiness Council (KASH) is a crucial platform that fosters collaboration to strengthen the voice of local actors in the agribusiness sector. KASH acts as a bridge between its members and governmental authorities, providing suggestions and recommendations on policies and strategies that impact the agricultural sector. Through this collaboration, KASH ensures that the voices of small and medium agricultural businesses are heard and considered in decision-making processes that directly affect them.

The organization also organizes forums and workshops where local actors can exchange knowledge, learn about best practices, and build strong networks. These activities enhance the capabilities of KASH members and improve their market position. Furthermore, KASH advocates for policies that create a favorable business environment and provides support in implementing high-quality standards, which are vital for competitiveness in international markets. Ultimately, KASH's commitment to fostering cooperation among local actors is essential for fundamental to building a more resilient and sustainable agribusiness sector in Albania.

“The voices of small and medium-sized agricultural businesses must be heard and considered in decision-making processes that directly affect them.”



Closing Remarks

The forum reaffirmed that a robust and modern Quality Infrastructure is indispensable for Albania's EU integration and sustainable industrial growth. By aligning national practices with international standards, fostering digitalization, and empowering SMEs, Albania is well-positioned to enhance its competitive edge and ensure long-term prosperity.

The collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach emphasized at the forum will pave the way for transformative advancements in quality and standards, establishing a strong foundation for Albania's journey towards European integration and sustainable development.





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